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SUBJECT: DE-BA,ATHIFICATION, ELECTION VIOLATIONS, MAR START
TO MUTHANNA PROVINCE,S CAMPAIGN SEASON

REF: A. 10 BAGHDAD 483
[B](#). 10 BAGHDAD 422
[C](#). 10 BAGHDAD 387
[D](#). 09 BAGHDAD 146

Classified By: PRT Team Leader John Kuschner for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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[1](#). (U) This is a PRT Muthanna reporting cable.

[2](#). (C/REL) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Much as it is dominating the business of governing in Muthanna (reftel A), anti-Ba,athist sentiment is a dominant theme of the campaign, for the moment. The furor is squeezing out other, more traditional campaign issues, such as jobs and essential services delivery. While the election season has begun with only a few reported campaign violations, there are rumors of vote buying efforts targeted at influential tribal leaders and localized geographic areas. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

DE-BA,ATHIFICATION AS A CAMPAIGN ISSUE

[3](#). (C) In the wake of the Accountability and Justice Committee,s de-Ba,athification decisions (reftel B), Muthanna,s politicians have taken up de-ba,athification as a central campaign issue this year. At a February 7 meeting with the PRT Team Leader, Governor Ibrahim Salman Al Mayali (Da,wa/State of Law Coalition) compared de-ba,athification to the exclusion of the Nazis from German government after the Second World War (reftel C). Other State of Law Alliance (SLA) and Sadrist Trend parliamentary candidates have also used similar rhetoric in recent weeks. One U.S. Army officer in Muthanna recently queried a local Iraqi Police contact on why anti-Ba,athist sentiment runs so deep here in Muthanna. He simply offered, &All families have scars from Saddam.8 This rhetoric is presently crowding out the typical campaign issues of jobs, corruption, and essential services delivery in this impoverished province.

A FEW VIOLATIONS, BUT OTHERWISE A QUIET START

[4](#). (SBU) At a February 15 meeting, Director Mutamed Namaa of the Governorate Electoral Office (GEO) told the PRT that preparations for the March 7 parliamentary elections are running smoothly. Some of the GEO,s work has been stalled because of the de-Ba,athification process. Also complicating matters, key GEO staff--specifically, the deputy director, an important auditor, and a logistician--have been sent abroad to help administer out-of-country voting, further reducing the office,s capabilities.

[5](#). (C) Prior to the start of the campaign season, the GEO Director cited three political parties for campaign violations. While the parties were not identified publicly, Namaa told the PRT the specifics of the citations. The GEO cited two parties for campaigning before the February 12 start date of the campaign season. The State of Law Coalition posted campaign signs and the 20th Revolution Bloc distributed hand flyers too early. The third violation was the Coalition of Willingness and Change electioneering during

the Arba,een pilgrimage to Karbala, a route that traverses the northern part of Muthanna. Namaa noted that his office employs ten individuals who investigate provincial campaign violations. He referred each matter to IHEC in Baghdad.

VOTE BUYING THROUGH PERFORMANCE INCENTIVES?

16. (C) A PRT locally engaged staff member noted that vote buying this election has become more sophisticated than in the 2009 provincial elections. While it was (and continues to be) an issue in the previous provincial election on an individual basis (reftel D), now some campaigns are targeting whole areas, especially rural ones, with performance incentives. If the local tribal sheikh can deliver a certain percent of the vote for a given list, that campaign will pledge a certain amount of cash to the tribal leader. Unconfirmed reports suggest that tribal leaders in the Khidr area of Muthanna are especially susceptible to this kind of vote buying and are being heavily courted by the major parties. (Note: PRT will try to clarify these claims. End Note.).

17. (C) Sheikh Raysan Mutashar Fahad Jiheel alZayadi (INA) complained to PRToffs that governmental resources are being misappropriated for campaign purposes. He cited, specifically, Mohammed Arboud al-Zayadi (Coalition of Iraqi Unity) because he ordered the municipalities department--in his capacity as First Deputy PC Chairman--to fix the roads in certain areas of Samawah where his supporters live, but neglected areas where he was politically weaker. In this way, he was literally fixing potholes for votes.

18. (C) When the PRT asked about vote buying, the GEO Director was largely dismissive of the possibility. He explained that when a voter is alone behind the voting screen, there is nothing to stop him or her from casting a ballot, notwithstanding any payoff that may have been made. He declined to comment on the matter of vote buying for whole areas. (Comment: Given that polling place vote tallies will be available after counting, accountability, in theory, can be better ascertained. End comment.)

COMMENT

19. (C) Given that Muthanna is almost an entirely Shi'a province, there is no political risk to criticizing the Ba,athists. Many local Sadrist Trend and SLA candidates are using this rhetoric to help rally their base and gain additional votes on Election Day. Legislation in the Provincial Council may be an important part of the campaign. If the recently passed law aimed at the de-Ba'athification of local government is implemented, it would have deleterious consequences for the functioning of the province that in turn, could impact the campaign. Despite this, the de-Ba,athification issue seems to be gaining resonance, as it has replaced essential services, jobs, and corruption as the primary campaign issues discussed this season. Nearly all of the major, competitive parties have embraced it to a greater or lesser extent, for fear of being branded soft on Ba,athists.8 Voters may tire of the issue in the waning days of the election season, however, if politicians cannot give them some other reason to vote for their candidacy. End comment.

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